

# Awakened Leadership in Today's Organizations

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**W**akefulness has yet to be widely established as a leadership style, but once fully understood and evaluated on its many advantages for leaders, their followers, and their organizations, it will get there.

Let's look at the concept of wakefulness as a leadership skill; examine some of the rewards for leaders and their organizations of applying awakened leadership; and consider some of the disadvantages of not applying awakened leadership.

Wakefulness, although practiced by various leaders, has thus far not been formally identified as a specific leadership trait. Yet if one looks deeper, it is evident that some leaders are applying wakefulness, sometimes partially and sometimes fully. Awakened leaders maintain a high level of alertness in every regard: toward themselves and their driving motives in various matters, toward the people and organizations they lead, toward the environment in which their organizations operate—and toward the entire universe.

In more popular terms an awakened leader could be described as a situational-plus leader. A situational leader is one who modifies his or her leadership style on the basis of both the situation and the people he or she works with. Such leaders evaluate these two factors and then determine the leadership style that will work best under the circumstances.

Awakened leadership goes far beyond situational leadership, however. The wakeful leader also pays

close attention to the organization's mission and the well-being of all stakeholders. This means that an awakened leader also considers environmental issues, societal issues, and the interests of customers, suppliers, and other constituents before determining his or her leadership style.

## FOUR APPROACHES

The wakeful aspect of leading is initially difficult to understand but is easy to apply once mastered. The awakened leader first decides whether to take a task and or a relationship orientation to the issue at hand (that is, he or she chooses between the two main areas of leading) and then determines which of four approaches to leadership—laissez-faire, empathetic, autocratic, or democratic (which together form the acronym LEAD)—will work best.

The laissez-faire approach works best in organizations that have a strong sense of self-direction—such as law firms, consultancies, and high-tech companies—and in which every worker is highly skilled and manages his or her own circle of clients.

The empathetic approach works best in organizations that are fairly small and primarily people oriented. Many nonprofit organizations fit into this category.

The autocratic approach is not the most popular style, but there are organizations in which it works. For

example, it is useful when a crisis occurs, and the leader is expected to give directions instead of calling a meeting and finding out what everyone suggests. The armed forces, because they often have to act on the spur of the moment and in crisis situations, are receptive to this leadership style.

The democratic approach, in which meetings are usually held to share information about emerging issues and to contemplate possible solutions, lends itself especially well to the academic environment.

But determining whether to take a people or a process approach and subsequently deepening one's choice by reviewing the four styles is just half the work of implementing awakened leadership. The next step for the leader is to evaluate, and if possible develop, a set of traits that will support a wakeful approach. Emotional intelligence and authenticity are the major requirements here.

Emotional intelligence is important because the awakened leader needs to know where he or she comes from, to be in touch with his or her values and morals, and to be attuned to co-workers' values and morals.

Authenticity is important because people are finally starting to realize that it is unnatural to park one's soul at the door when entering the workplace. Bringing your entire self into the workplace, without fear of being ridiculed or backstabbed, and using your entire self for the betterment of

yourself and your organization are the keys to authenticity.

## WAKEFULNESS IN ACTION

In my observations of awakened leaders, I have encountered some informative examples:

- At a university in California I followed the behavior of an associate dean who managed to maneuver through various political schemes within the organization in order to remain afloat and continue to be a star performer throughout the years. This leader chose to apply the democratic leadership style and incorporated all the other important ingredients of awakened leadership. He consistently brought issues he had encountered or thought through to the table for brainstorming and ensured that everyone had a part to play and no one felt left out. On issues pertaining to student development, for instance, he regularly consulted the various student bodies to ensure appropriate feedback.

- At a small, multinational consultancy, I watched an awakened leader who applied the laissez-faire approach as his foundation while incorporating all the other elements of awakened leadership. This leader managed to keep the size of the organization small but its influence in multinational operations large. His organization is credited with having successfully guided many business operations in China, Japan, and Korea to branch out to the United States, and vice versa.

- At a large fruit cooperative that operates in the United States but obtains its resources from around the world, I encountered a leader who applied an interesting blend of democratic and autocratic leadership, along with the other traits of awakened leadership. In crisis situations this leader realized that orders were expected, so he gave them. In his day-to-day approach, however, he employed the democratic approach, ensuring that the

input of people at various levels of the organization was considered.

- At two nonprofit organizations, both involved in youth-related work, I encountered two leaders who took the empathetic approach. Both were open to input from co-workers, suppliers, and clients; were strongly in touch with the populations they served; and were concerned with the well-being of all their employees.

## FACE THE MUSIC

There are numerous consequences of not being wakeful.

Leaders who refrain from a wakeful approach in today's increasingly interdependent business world will find themselves becoming outsiders in the global village. The continuous intermingling of cultures leaves no room for holding onto a single leadership style. Even when a leader operates in just one city, county, or state, he or she will find the need to apply an awakened approach because workforces are becoming more multiethnic and multicultural and display an increasing diversity of ages and skills.

Organizations in which leaders employ a single style—even if this style has worked well in the past—will find themselves at a disadvantage compared with competitors who move faster because they have mastered the multidimensional approach of wakefulness. Organizations with wakeful leaders are more open to change and therefore encourage organizational learning, both inside and outside the work environments. These organizations encourage workers to continuously question current processes in the workplace and to suggest improved methods. They focus on encouraging continuous education among their workers, realizing that even though some workers may exit once they have obtained an increased level of skills and knowledge, workers who feel valued and encouraged are less likely to leave a nurturing environment. This decreases turnover and

enhances the organization's quality of output, which in turn positively affects the bottom line.

## WORDS OF WISDOM

I asked the leaders described earlier what advice they had for leaders who are aspiring to become more wakeful, and they suggested the following:

*See your responsibility in a much broader way.* Too many business executives are overly occupied with a narrow vision and don't consider the full responsibilities their companies have to the societies in which they operate. It is important that today's leaders consider their responsibilities beyond the bottom line.

*Walk your talk.* Pay more than lip service to your relationships with your employees. Mission statements should be more than just plaques on walls or desks. One leader said, "If you take good care of your people, they will take good care of you and your mission."

*Be more in touch with all levels of your company.* Encourage a team spirit and an elevated sense of meaning. This will lead to greater employee satisfaction and, ultimately, increased productivity.

*Promote a corporate culture that addresses humanity as a whole.* Focus on all stakeholders (workers, shareholders, customers, suppliers, and society) rather than just the stockholders.

*Continue to develop the qualities of awakened leadership.* By doing so you will convert leadership from a duty to a highly gratifying experience. ✍

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